

XXXVIII.—*Letters, Announcements, &c.*

We have received the following letters addressed to the Editors of 'The Ibis':—

SIRS,—I have been always puzzled by the name of *Strix flammea*, given by Linnæus to the Barn-Owl, as I could never understand why a bird which has not the slightest sign of the flame-colour should have been called *flammea*. Quite lately, looking into Gesner's celebrated work 'De Avibus,' I have found what I think may be the explanation of how it was that Linnæus used that name, which really is very inappropriate when we take it to mean the colour of flame, as Mr. Wharton has done in the 'Ibis' List of British Birds (p. 85).

Gesner, in the above-mentioned work, treating of the Barn-Owl, "De altero genere Ululæ, quod quidam *flammeatum* cognominant," after having given a figure of it, wrote as follows:—"Figura hæc est generis cujusdam ululæ, quod Germani circa Argentoratum vocant SCHLEYEREUL, id est *Ululam flammeatam*, quod nescio quomodo plumis circa faciem mulieris peplo seu *flammeo* obvolutæ caput et faciem referat."

From this it appears to me very probable that Linnæus wrote *flammea* instead of *flammeata*, thinking that *flammea* could be used like *flammeata*, to mean enveloped in a veil; and if I am right, *flammea*, in Linnæus's mind, was not connected with *flamma*=*flame*, but with *flammeum* or *flameum*, the nuptial veil, which was of a crocus or yellow colour.

Yours, &c.,

T. SALVADORI.

Turin, Zoological Museum, May 5th, 1886.

SIRS,—I have the pleasure of informing you that Dr. Julius von Madarász, of Budapest, and I have the intention of publishing a monograph of the Pipridæ, with coloured plates from the pencil of Herr von Madarász, representing all the known species.

The work will be issued in about ten parts, in 4to, each containing six plates, with corresponding letterpress. The first part will appear next September. The price of each part will be twelve florins.

Yours, &c.,
PELZELN.

SIRS,—In my paper on *Trachyphonus* (*antea*, p. 109) there is a misprint, which I beg of you to allow me to correct. Under *Tr. boehmi* is given, as a locality, “Abdul Gindi, (Mus. Paris).” Now Abdul Gindi is the name of an Egyptian person, not of a locality. M. Oustalet informed me that the specimen in question was obtained from Abdul Gindi.

Yours, &c.,
G. HARTLAUB.

Bremen, 20th April, 1886.

74 Jermyn Street, St. James's,
May 17th, 1886.

SIRS,—I have lately returned from a pleasant two months' sojourn in Egypt and at Athens, during which a few ornithological facts came under my notice which I think worth recording in 'The Ibis.' I left Naples on 25th of January last by an Italian steamer bound for Malta. On the morning of the 27th I found myself in the harbour of Catania, with a few hours to spend on shore. I went at once to the bird-market, and there saw no less than ten Purple Gallinules (*Porphyrio cæruleus*) exposed for sale, which the vendors told me came from the *pantani*, or marshes, a few miles to the south of Catania. About two hours later I went back to the market, before returning to the steamer, and found that two more Porphyrios had been brought in. I bought two of the best specimens for a franc each, took them with me to Malta, and there skinned them.

After staying a week at Malta I went by P. & O. steamer to Port Said, and through the Canal to Suez. In the Canal

I was struck by the vast number of Gulls which closely followed our ship, and scrambled for pieces of bread which I amused myself by throwing to them. I was also struck by the fact that the majority of these Gulls were *Larus canus*, a species I had never previously met with in Egypt. Mixed with these were a smaller number of *Larus leucophæus* and *Larus ridibundus*. I also saw a few pairs of *Larus ichthyæetus*, but these majestic birds did not condescend to follow our ship or take any notice of the bread thrown to their smaller relatives.

At Suez, where I stayed two days, I noticed the same absence of Passerine birds as on former visits; the ubiquitous Sparrow and the obtrusive Grey Crow (*Corvus cornix*), which swarm in all other parts of Egypt, were nowhere to be seen; the only Passerine birds were *Motacilla alba* and *Corvus umbrinus*, which last species is, I think, more abundant at Suez than anywhere else in Egypt. Thence I went to Cairo, and stayed there from February 12th to March 1st, when I went up the Nile to Thebes. At Cairo I used frequently to spend the half hour before and the half hour after sunset in the beautiful Esbekyeh garden. In the centre of this is a lake, over which, up to sunset, a quantity of Swallows, *Hirundo savignii*, were always flying about, catching insects. Evening after evening I used to see a large Sparrow-hawk, *Accipiter nisus*, which, from its size, I judged to be a female, make its appearance just before sunset, while the Swallows were still flying about. Of these it never took any notice, having perhaps found out by experience that they were more trouble to catch than they were worth; but it would perch on the top of some tree commanding the lake and wait till the sun had set and the Swallows taken themselves off, and in their place a swarm of small Bats came on the scene, flitting about over the lake. Now was the time for the Hawk's supper, and it used to dash in among the Bats, catch one in an instant, take it off to a tree, and there eat it; and it generally found time to catch a second one before it got too dark for further operations. I once went under the tree where the Hawk was eating its Bat, and picked

up one of the Bat's wings which it had dropped. So far as I know, this Bat-catching propensity of the Sparrow-hawk has never before been recorded.

The trees round this same lake in the Esbekyeh garden were frequented by numerous large Fruit-bats, which began to move about half an hour after sunset, and which I never saw elsewhere in Cairo, or in any other part of Egypt. This fact, although not exactly ornithological, is not altogether devoid of interest, for I fancy that the presence of a Fruit-bat in Egypt has escaped the notice of most recent travellers in that country.

The Red-breasted Goose, *Bernicla ruficollis*, is not now found in Upper Egypt, and, with the exception of one specimen obtained by Mr. Stafford Allen at Alexandria, I do not know of any instance of its having been seen anywhere in Egypt in recent times. I was therefore much interested in finding this species accurately and repeatedly represented in the tombs of the kings at Thebes, the figures of it being carved in the limestone walls of the tomb, and accurately coloured, so that there can be no doubt whatever as to the species intended to be represented*.

I left Egypt on March 24th, and went direct to Athens, where I stayed ten days. The ornithological fact that struck me most at Athens was the great number of Ravens, *Corvus corax*, in and around the city. They roost in the precipitous sides of the Acropolis, and may be seen flying over the town all day, but more especially towards evening. Returning home one afternoon from a drive to Eleusis, I saw, just before sunset, at least thirty or forty Ravens all together, flying round a rocky hill about two miles from Athens, on which they no doubt roosted. Never in any country have I seen the Raven so abundant as at and around Athens.

Yours, &c.,
E. CAVENDISH TAYLOR.

* [Cf. Yarrell's Brit. Birds, ed. 4, vol. iv. p. 284.—EDD.]

Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.,
May 14, 1886.

†
SIRS,—I wish to thank you for your very kind review of my ‘Ornithological Explorations in Kamtschatka and the Commander Islands.’ At the same time I take the liberty to protest against a remark in the footnote (*anteà*, p. 202), referring to me as “*a stickler for correct names*” in connection with “corrections” of a philological nature. It is true that I am endeavouring to use names which are correct *ornithologically*, and in that respect I may be “a stickler;” but my stand in regard to philological corrections of names *already given*, is clearly expressed in the following quotation from a paper written by me five years ago:—

“As to the rules of the nomenclature, it seems to me that the best are those which present the smallest number of exceptions, and which, once adopted, give the least occasion for disputes. I therefore propose to use the oldest available name in every case, where it can be proved, and to spell it exactly as it was spelled when published for the first time, notwithstanding incorrect derivation, barbarous offspring, *error facti*, &c.

“The significance of a name, by means of the sound and the appearance, is to give a conception of the named object as being different from all other objects. If it, at the same time, can be formed so that it indicates one or another chief property of the object, then it is the better. The main point is, however, that we, by hearing or seeing the name, will get an idea of the object as being different from any other.

“That names which do not signify anything cause no inconvenience worth mentioning is evident from the numberless specific names, indicating a quality common to all the species within the same genus, e. g. *cinereus*, *fuscus*, &c. It may be rather tedious that the names are incorrect; but the simply endless number of incorrect names with which we daily work without feeling especially troubled, and which probably no one intends to change or correct, shows better than anything else how unimportant the corrections and

improvements are for facilitating the work. I think that we may very soon agree that many corrections have caused more trouble than relief—as, for instance, such improvements as *Heniconetta* for *Eniconetta*, and the like—and that they only have succeeded in swelling our lists of synonyms.

“The only rule which can be carried out with safety is the use of the oldest name, without regard to its appearance, derivation, or signification. If this be adopted, most differences would disappear from the nomenclature, and it is in fact the only rule which is able to establish a passable uniformity in place of the present variety. Once universally accepted and put to practice, it would save much time, labour, and dispute; disputes concerning year and date may easily be settled, while all philological and linguistic disagreements may be thereby avoided. The question as to which species one or another name is to be referred has nothing to do with the rules of nomenclature, and is therefore liable to come up at any time.”—*Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus.* v. 1882, p. 28.

My proposition was adopted by the Committee of the American Ornithological Union on Classification and Nomenclature, and is embodied in Canon XL. of the Code (‘Code and Check-List, A. O. U.,’ 1886, p. 51).

I am, yours truly,

LEONHARD STEJNEGER.

[We regret that we have unintentionally misrepresented Dr. Stejneger’s views in the criticism above noticed.—EDD.]

Reeves’s Pheasant at Home.—The ‘Field’ of May 15th contains a letter from Mr. E. Fitzgerald Creagh, with an interesting account of his chase after *Phasianus reevesi*.

“It was from Tchang, a post at the head waters of the Yangtzu, the great river of China, or rather where that river leaves its gorges, that I started with the stream to a large valley where I knew Reeves’s Pheasants had been seen. It is

useless to ask any questions of the country folk, who will always say yes. I therefore landed and walked along a wide valley, with high perpendicular mountains of conglomerate on either side, and beetling over small woods of cypress. The birds live on the berry of this tree, and fly from one wood to another. They will never show themselves if they can avoid it, and, through their great fleetness when running, steal away before the dogs. Sometimes, however, when taken by surprise, they rise, and then only by great caution can a single sportsman hope to get them. Surrounding the small woods with several guns is the best way to bag them. I think they drive away the common Pheasant, for I have never seen them together. This may, perhaps, be due to the fact of their living on different food. I had with me at the time a spaniel and a red Irish setter, and, as the day was fine and clear, walked on quietly until I came to what appeared a good country. The hills here were lower, and the wood fairly dense, but free of undergrowth. A woodcutter told me he had seen several Pheasants a few days ago, but could give me no further information, so, tying up my spaniel, I determined to work quietly along with the setter. Although it was January the day was hot, and I was obliged to divest myself of my coat as I struggled up the hill. I worked along the lower part without coming on any scent. Suddenly the setter got very busy, and moved along, showing me that he had some large game. I followed on as well as I could over the broken ground. False scent, back again; then the dog took a turn up the almost perpendicular rock. Good gracious! thought I, how can birds get up there and leave any scent? They had evidently helped themselves with their wings. I was determined to follow, and brought the setter back to a place where we succeeded in getting on to the upper ledge after a little scrambling. Having arrived at the top, as I had anticipated, we soon came on the scent again, and away went the dog, very cautiously setting every now and again. Just ahead of us now was a stone wall. I was very much afraid that my game would rise just as I was getting over, so I made all preparation for a surprise, and at

the moment the setter, who had passed the wall, was at a 'dead set.' I knew there were several birds or some larger game by the general activity and caution shown by the dog. I was soon over the wall, ready for anything. I surveyed my position in a moment. Below me was long grass, on the ledge I had left some thick and high trees, on my right a hill, also with long, rank grass, but no wood. I moved forwards a few paces, but the dog was there like a marble statue. I was very badly placed, for I could not see where the game could be. Up got six Reeves's Pheasants, splendid birds. I felt certain of two. I am sorry to say, however, I only succeeded in bagging one, which went rolling down the hill in his last struggles. I bounded after him, afraid the dog would moult the beautiful plumage. The bird I had bagged was a cock, measuring 5 feet 4 inches from the bill to end of tail-feathers. From the time I first came on their scent the distance over which I worked must have been a mile; I was therefore glad of a rest. The birds had flown in all directions, so there was no use marking them. My left barrel had been ineffectually discharged at a fine cock, which flew straight across the valley."

Radde's Scientific Expedition in Transcaspia.—The 'Times' informs us that M. Radde, the traveller and naturalist now engaged in a scientific tour in Central Asia, has written the following letter to the Russian paper 'Novosti,' dated Askabad, April 6 (N.S.):—"At first the weather was not favourable. The spring was late this year by at least three or four weeks. Up to the present all my investigations have only resulted in discovering 35 specimens of phanerogamic plants. Our collection of birds consists already of 150 different kinds, among which a *Picus scindiacus* forms a new addition to Russian fauna." The 'Novosti' goes on to state that M. Radde made several excursions from Askabad both into the desert and to the mountains. At Hennab, on the Persian frontier, the expedition encountered a violent snow-

storm. M. Radde will reach Merv in the course of the present month (May), and will then examine the mountains between the Murghab and Tejend. In July he will return to Askabad *viâ* Sarakhs, and then proceed through Khorasan to Meshed. Before his final return to Europe M. Radde will visit Teheran.

Mr. H. O. Forbes in New Guinea.—The last account of Mr. H. O. Forbes in South-eastern New Guinea states that he was in camp at Sogeri, fifty miles from Port Moresby, and intending to ascend Mount Owen Stanley when the season permitted.

News of Mr. H. H. Johnston.—Mr. H. H. Johnston has settled himself in Mondole or Mondoli Island, in Amba Bay, as H.B.M. Vice-Consul for the Cameroons, and sends us a good account of his health and prospects. Writing April 13th, he tells us that he has already found a collector, and is purposing to send him up the Cameroons with a staff of several natives as assistants as soon as possible. The only birds yet obtained on this mountain, so far as we know, are those collected by Sir R. Burton during his ascent in 1861, and described by George R. Gray in the *Annals of Nat Hist.* for that year (ser. 3, vol. x. p. 443). Where such curious birds as *Strobilophaga burtoni* occur we may reasonably expect further novelties.

Rediscovery of Platycercus unicolor.—Captain F.W. Hutton writes to us that a specimen of *Platycercus unicolor*, Vigors (P. Z. S. 1831, p. 24), has been received at the Christchurch Museum, from Antipodes Island, off the coast of New Zealand. This species was based by Vigors on a single specimen living in the Zoological Society's Gardens in 1831, and subsequently transferred to the British Museum. For

55 years, therefore, its exact habitat has remained unknown, and no second specimen has been obtained.

Anniversary Meeting of the British Ornithologists' Union, 1886.—The Annual Meeting of the British Ornithologists' Union was held at 6 Tenterden Street, on Wednesday, the 19th May, at 6 P.M., Mr. SCLATER in the Chair.

The Minutes of the last Meeting having been read and confirmed, the Committee presented the following Report:—

“The Committee are glad to be able to point out that, in spite of the existing widespread depression, the British Ornithologists' Union maintains its prosperity. During the past year, owing to the exercise of rigid economy, the expenses connected with the publication of the Journal have been kept well within bounds, the remainder of the debt incurred through the publication of the ‘List of British Birds’ has now been entirely liquidated, and there is now a balance in hand. Moreover, the stock in hand of the above-mentioned list is an asset that must not be lost sight of. The sale of the List having recently been small, your Committee suggest that, in order to assist in clearing off the stock, any Members of the B.O.U. should be permitted to purchase one copy of the List for 5s., or three copies for 10s. 6d.

“At the last Anniversary Meeting the number of Members of the B.O.U. amounted to 174: viz. 146 Ordinary, 1 Extraordinary, 8 Honorary, and 19 Foreign Members. At the present Anniversary it has been increased to 183: viz. 155 Ordinary, 1 Extraordinary, 8 Honorary, and 19 Foreign Members.

“The Candidates for admission at this Anniversary are 17, of which 15 are proposed as Ordinary, 1 as an Honorary, and 1 as a Foreign Member.”

The Report having been agreed to and adopted, the following new Ordinary Members were balloted for and declared to be duly elected:—Lieut. Harold Stuart Ferguson, of 16 Albemarle Street, W.; The Earl of Gainsborough; William Graham, Esq., Manor House, Crayford, Kent; Harold Little-

dale, Esq., B.A. &c., Vice-Principal of the College, Baroda ; The Rev. Hugh Alexander Macpherson, of 3 Kensington Gardens Square, W. ; John Guille Millais, Esq., F.Z.S., of 2 Palace Gate, Kensington, W. ; Howard Hill John Nicholls, Esq., M.R.C.S., of The Moat, Eastbourne ; E. Cambridge Phillips, Esq., of The Elms, Brecon ; E. Lort Phillips, Esq., of 22 Bolton Street, Piccadilly, W. ; William Carstairs Shaw, Esq., of the Bank of Madras, Ootacamund, India ; Lieut. Horace A. Terry, of the 43rd Light Infantry, India ; Edward Hamilton, Esq., M.D. &c., of 40 Portugal Street, W. ; Harry Berkeley James, Esq., F.Z.S. &c., of Aldridge, Walsall ; George Muirhead, Esq., of Paxton, Berwick-on-Tweed ; and Major H. Wade Dalton, of the Middlesex Regiment, Aldershot. Mr. Thomas Ayres, of Potchefstroom, Transvaal, was also elected an Honorary, and Dr. Julius von Madarász, of the National Museum, Buda-Pesth, a Foreign Member of the B.O.U.

The President and Secretary having been re-elected, Mr. Edward Cavendish Taylor was elected on the Committee in the place of Mr. O. Salvin, who retired by rotation. Thus the Officers for the year 1886-87 are as follows :—

President.

The Right Hon. Lord Lilford.

Secretary.

H. E. Dresser, Esq.

Editors.

P. L. Selater, Esq.

Howard Saunders, Esq.

Committee.

W. T. Blanford, Esq.

F. DuCane Godman, Esq.

Edward Cavendish Taylor, Esq.

It was then suggested by Mr. R. B. Sharpe that a notice should be sent round early in the year announcing the date for the Annual Meeting, so that Members living abroad should

have ample time to propose Candidates ; and the Committee promised to take this suggestion into consideration.

A discussion ensued as to whether the B. O. U. could in any way cooperate with the Selborne Society in trying to put a stop to the wholesale destruction of birds for the purpose of feminine decoration. A proposal by Mr. R. B. Sharpe for the appointment of a Committee of the B. O. U. to "consider whether any and what steps should be taken to stop the undue destruction of wild birds" was put to the Meeting and lost.

A vote of thanks to the Chairman, as also to Captain Shelley for the use of his room, was carried unanimously.

The Meeting then adjourned, and the Annual Dinner, held at the Café Royal, was attended by twenty-eight Members and guests.

OBITUARY. *Prof. E. von Boeck, of Cochabamba.*—We much regret to hear from Dr. W. Blasius of the sudden death of his correspondent, Prof. Eugen von Boeck, Director of the Central School of Bolivia, and Member of the Permanent International Ornithological Committee. Prof. v. Boeck died at Cochabamba on the 30th of January last, of an attack of cholera. One of his first ornithological articles was a paper on the Birds of Valdivia (Naumannia, 1855, pp. 494–513), the last those on the Birds of Cochabamba (*vide supra*, pp. 365, 366). At the time of his decease Prof. v. Boeck was engaged on a translation of Taczanowski's 'Ornithologie du Pérou.' Under very disadvantageous circumstances the Professor exerted himself in every way to advance our knowledge of South-American ornithology.

Heer François P. L. Pollen.—We are informed that Heer Pollen, the explorer of Madagascar in company with D. C. Van Dam, and fellow-author with the late Prof. Schlegel of the volume of Mammals and Birds of the 'Recherches sur la Faune de Madagascar' (1868), has recently died at Scheveningen, where he was German Consular Agent.